

The Wingbeat

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Note from the Director: *So many of you took the time to fill out the volunteer time sheets. These are required by our funding source as matching "money," and will help ensure that the atlas receives future funding. I should have enough hours "documented" to match now, thanks to your diligence. A big thanks goes out to everyone who sent in their form! - Rosalind Renfrew*

1. NORTHEAST KINGDOM BLOCKBUSTING

The 2005 atlassing season was a bumper year for the Northeast Kingdom, thanks to an all-out blockbusting campaign that had volunteers and field biologists roaming the state's most rural region. Their collective efforts resulted in significant progress or completion of 29 blocks in the Northeast Kingdom!

Volunteers converged for two weekends on Caledonia, Orleans, and Lamoille counties, making significant progress (and in some cases completing) six previously unassigned blocks. Dorothy Allard and Cedric Alexander generously donated their family camps for the occasion.

It's amazing what can be done in two weekends! Here's the breakdown:

Craftsbury 3: 81 species, 36 confirmed. Crystal Lake 3: 84 species, 32 confirmed. Caspian Lake 3: 85 species, 25 confirmed. Caspian Lake 6: 73 species, 26 confirmed. Morrisville 3: 52 species, 3 confirmed. Stannard 1: 81 species, 20 confirmed.

The comraderie and socializing was the other half of the fun! We enjoyed great dinners (thanks to Bill Garrard for volunteering his fancy BBQ catering skills!) and atlas story-swapping. The adventurous treks down the class 4 roads during the rainiest weekend of the summer provided us all with a true (and in some cases, unforgettable) Kingdom experience.

A big thanks to the atlasers for making the trip to dedicate extra time and effort, covering blocks that otherwise might have slipped through the cracks: Toby Alexander, Dorothy Allard, Barbara Brosnan, John Chamberlain, Mary Daly, Sylvia Harris, Eric Lazarus, Bill Martin, Michelle Patenaude, Judy Peterson, Al and Lois Richardson, Sue Wetmore, Mike Winslow, and Jeanne Wisner.

This summer also brought atlassing by field biologists who took Essex, Caledonia, and Orleans counties by storm, racking up species lists and confirms like nobody's business. All tolled, field biologists completed 23 blocks: 11 in Orleans County, 1 in Lamoille County, and 11 in Essex County.

Biologists Julie Hart (UVM alum), Chris Jager (UVM alum), and volunteer Miles Masci had no qualms about taking on the most difficult and least accessible blocks in the state in the far northeast corner and in Orleans most northern blocks. Their dedication and persistence helped them maintain high spirits despite being subjected to the most oppressive mosquito, black fly, and horsefly violence in the state. They were rewarded with finds of boreal delights such as Black-backed Woodpecker nests, Gray Jays, Boreal Chickadees, and countless daily moose sightings (one of which led to the creation of their collective name "Team Blue Mooselet"). Diane Wells (UVM alum) helped out further south, mostly in Caledonia County, adding another 4 blocks to the season's accomplishments. Orleans atlas coordinator Jayson Benoit (Northwoods Stewardship Center) spent some time whipping Orleans County into better shape, going out to blocks that were unlikely to receive coverage.

Thank you again to all who rolled up their sleeves and made an outstanding contribution to Vermont's Breeding Bird Atlas!

In 2006 we're turning our focus to needy blocks in southern Vermont, and hoping to have a repeat performance! If your own county is in good shape, consider helping out your neighbors. We will need to work together across the state in order to complete all counties! For more information contact the atlas (rrenfrew@vinsweb.org, 802-457-1053 X 127).

2. WHIP-POOR-WILL SURVEY RESULTS

All indicators suggest that Whip-poor-will populations have undergone dramatic declines. How many are left, and where are they? Answers to these questions can help us determine what habitats this mysterious species is keying in on, and possibly give us hints as to why they are declining. That their population is declining is an accepted fact among ornithologists, but there are no coordinated efforts to monitor populations and to determine what habitat characteristics they prefer and where to focus conservation efforts.

In Year 3 of the atlas, VINS teamed up with NH Audubon and The Northeast Partners in Flight Working Group to search for Whip-poor-wills, as part of a region-wide pilot project to begin assessing their distribution in the Northeastern US. The report from the 2005 pilot year follows, and we are grateful to all who participated.

We will be improving monitoring techniques next year based on what we learned. Consider joining us in expanding our monitoring effort – it only takes one hour per year! For more information, contact the atlas (rrenfrew@vinsweb.org).

New England Whip-poor-will Surveys

2005 Summary

By Pamela D. Hunt, NH Audubon

NOTE: For the full summary report with maps (they are great maps!), go to the results page on the atlas website at <http://www.uvm.edu/~vbba/resultssofar.htm>

Background

The Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*) is widespread over most of New England, occurring throughout the region except in northern Maine and at higher elevations. Available evidence suggests that the species is declining over most of its North American range, although it remains common in some areas. However, because Whip-poor-wills are largely crepuscular they are poorly surveyed by traditional survey methods, such as the Breeding Bird survey (BBS), trends derived from the BBS should be viewed with a healthy amount of caution. A decline is also indicated by the majority of anecdotal accounts, and a small number of more targeted surveys suggest that the species is less common or less widely distributed than in the past.

This widespread decline has resulted in the Whip-poor-will being listed as a species of management concern throughout the northeastern portion of its range. Although not considered threatened or endangered in any jurisdiction, it is included as a priority species in the Wildlife Action Plans of all New England States. Because of increased conservation concern, especially when coupled with the lack of solid data, the Northeast Working Group of Partners in Flight (PIF) identified Whip-poor-wills (and nightjars in general) as a monitoring priority 2004. Whip-poor-wills had already been surveyed to a variable extent in New Hampshire and Massachusetts during 2002-2004, so a pilot project was developed to expand the survey effort in New England before taking it to the Regional level. Surveys were implemented in May-July 2005 in four New England states: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

2005 Methodology

Because Whip-poor-wills are significantly more active during nights with high lunar illumination, the survey period was restricted to evenings when the moon was at least 50% illuminated and above the horizon, and cloud cover was minimal.

Previous Whip-poor-will surveys in New Hampshire and Massachusetts were conducted using point counts along roadside routes, and conducted in the early evening when calling activity is most intense. These early routes consisted of ten points spaced 0.5 miles apart, and at which an observer recorded any Whip-poor-wills detected over a five minute period. Routes were surveyed three times during the peak breeding season from late May through early July.

To streamline the survey program's expansion into other states like Vermont, new surveys took place along pre-existing routes used for monitoring American Woodcocks. These routes were established in the 1960s, and consist of ten points spaced 0.4 miles apart, again along roads. Because the woodcock surveys occur too early in the season to detect Whip-poor-wills, these routes needed to be covered a second time during the peak Whip-poor-will breeding season as defined below.

Results

Surveys were ultimately coordinated in four of the six New England states: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont, with 99 routes surveyed for Whip-poor-wills during the appropriate lunar windows. In all four states, state coordinators also solicited reports of Whip-poor-wills that were not detected on official survey routes. These data, and similar data provided by cooperators in Maine and Rhode Island, were used to compile a rough map of current Whip-poor-will distribution in New England that could be compared to the distribution based on state atlas projects conducted during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

New Hampshire results: 2005 marks the third year that some level of Whip-poor-will monitoring has occurred in New Hampshire, although this was the first year that the effort was state-wide. Twelve of the state's 24 woodcock routes were surveyed for Whip-poor-wills, and 11 new routes were established.

Whip-poor-wills were detected on 18 of the 43 routes run in New Hampshire, with an additional 27 locations reported to Audubon that were not along routes. Based on these data, Whip-poor-wills continue to be most abundant in the Merrimack River valley (41 birds were reported in this area) and in the Ossipee Pine Barrens in central Carroll County. In the core of this habitat, 22 birds were reported from just the towns of Madison and Freedom, including a remarkable 12 on a single route north of Ossipee Lake.

Summary of Whip-poor-will survey effort and results in New England during 2005.

State	# Routes Surveyed	Rts w/ WPWI	Total WPWI	Additional WPWI	Total state count	Success of woodcock routes: # with WPWI/# run
NH	43	18	54+	43	97+	1/12
VT	18	3	3	36	39	1/12
MA	10	4	39	63+	102+	0/4
CT	28	2	9	16+	25+	1/24
Sum	99	27	105+	158+	263+	3/52

Elsewhere in the state the species appears more thinly distributed. Non-route data suggest a small cluster of locations in central Rockingham County (Raymond, Lee, Kingston and vicinity), and perhaps another in the extreme southwest (Hinsdale, Winchester). In general however, the pattern of reports from outside the Ossipee and Merrimack areas was of single birds scattered about the state, with the northernmost records from Jefferson. Whip-poor-wills remain rare or absent in three parts of the state: western highlands, White Mountains, and northern Coos County, a pattern similar to that shown by the Breeding Bird Atlas data from the early 1980s.

Regional results: Although the highest concentration of Whip-poor-will surveys occurred in New Hampshire, a significant number of routes were also run in Connecticut and Vermont, with a few additional surveys in Massachusetts. As was the case in New Hampshire, Whip-poor-wills were detected on very few of the woodcock routes. There was less of an effort in Connecticut and Vermont to establish routes in addition to those used for woodcock monitoring, which may be the reason behind fewer route-based detections of Whip-poor-wills in those states. However, both state coordinators solicited Whip-poor-will observations from birders and the general public. In Massachusetts, only four woodcock routes were surveyed, and an additional six routes were created and surveyed. Finally, records of Whip-poor-wills from May-August 2005 were obtained from state bird records compilers in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island.

Whip-poor-will concentrations occurred in the Champlain Valley (VT), upper Connecticut River Valley (VT/NH), lower Connecticut River Valley (MA/CT), coastal Connecticut and Rhode Island, southeastern Massachusetts, the Merrimack River Valley and nearby coastal plain (ME/NH/MA), and the Ossipee area (NH). These are similar to concentrations indicated by Breeding Bird Atlas data, although recent data are lacking for the central Connecticut River Valley and the highlands of western Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is important to note that the current monitoring effort cannot tell us anything about population trends at the moment. While the species' distribution does not appear to have changed significantly in New England, BBS and anecdotal data still indicate a serious decline. The goal of the current monitoring program is to establish a long-term project using set routes across the Whip-poor-will's range, and thus collect standardized data that can then be analyzed for population trends.

From the data collected in 2005, it is clear that a system of randomly placed routes (e.g., woodcock routes) is not an effective means of monitoring Whip-poor-wills, at least in New England. Because the species is widely dispersed and perhaps limited to certain habitats, it is not regularly detected on such routes. Without a large enough sample size of detections, it is essentially impossible to obtain meaningful information on population trends. On the other hand, routes placed "randomly" within potential habitat or known concentration areas regularly detected Whip-poor-wills, often in relatively high numbers. This would suggest that an effective monitoring program would need to place routes (or individual point count locations) in some sort of stratified sampling framework across the region. Areas of higher Whip-poor-will abundance can be identified using the current data, and survey locations established within those areas.

3. A NOTE ABOUT BAD (BLOCK ATTACHMENT DISORDER)

Do you have BAD? To find out, answer the following questions:

1. Have you continued to return to a block even after meeting the standards for completion (75 species found, 35 of those species confirmed)?
2. Are you reluctant to begin a new block even though you are finished or almost finished with one?
3. Do thoughts of moving on to another block cause loss of appetite, sleeplessness, nausea, and general lack of energy?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, you likely have been afflicted with BAD, also known as Block Attachment Disorder.

BAD is often caused by one or more of the following:

1. The well-meaning desire to record all occurring species or as many species as possible on a block
2. A deep, sincere appreciation for the habitat and beauty of a block
3. The perception that obtaining more data beyond what is required will provide more valuable information than collecting information on a new, uncovered block

4. A relentless search for one or more rare species suspected to be on a block

If you have BAD, don't feel bad! None of the above reasons for BAD are unbecoming or adverse traits – on the contrary, they demonstrate an atlaser's determination and dedication. However, if you think you may have BAD, you may want to consider letting go of those old blocks that have 75 species with 35 confirmed, and move on. For private counseling that is completely confidential, contact renfrew@vinsweb.org (802-457-1053 X 127). Make today the day you turn over a new leaf in your life!

[A special thanks to Sue Wetmore for bringing this terrible affliction to our attention.]

4. MEET THE COORDINATORS: TED ALLEN

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, I moved to Vermont as soon as I got out of the Navy, finished a BA at Brandeis and a Master of Arts in Teaching degree at Wesleyan in Connecticut, having visited my grandparents here in Post Mills every year beginning two months before I was born in 1940. I taught at Royalton School of International Affairs, as Vermont Law School was then known, in 1968 and 1969 and then worked for the State of Vermont in Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Corrections and Social and Rehabilitation Services for the next 27 years. After retiring from the state I worked for Orange and Washington County Court Diversion Programs during the next seven years and for the last two of those years was the state coordinator for the Association of Court Diversion Programs. Retiring from both of those roles in 2003 has permitted me to devote more time to birding, especially the current atlas project. My wife Cosette and I first dated at ages 13 and 15 respectively and married in 1963. From the point that our two daughters were old enough until Cosette's death in January 2005, my wife and I birded together wherever we vacationed, from Newfoundland to Costa Rica and Florida to Vancouver as well as throughout Vermont.

I came late to organized birding and began my involvement with Central Vermont Audubon Society in about 1985, having become actively interested in learning more about birds several years earlier while vacationing in Florida where the birds are big, slow and easy to find. I birded with Audubon for eighteen years or so, edited and wrote much of the chapter newsletter for a few years, served several stints as a board member and chapter president and lead field trips for the chapter around the New England area for about twelve or so years.

My birding with a purpose began with participation in the Plainfield Christmas Bird Count under the tutelage of Pat Pratt in the mid 1980's. I became count coordinator in 1990 or 1991 and have continued in that role through last year. Next came the Conte Refuge Stopover Habitat Study in the Connecticut River Basin in 1996-1998; the researching and compiling of a checklist for Berlin Pond through the Audubon Chapter in the same period; and the Vermont Airport

Grassland Breeding Bird Project which I initiated in 1999 and carried on for several years before making a gift of it to the State Audubon Program. I still keep tabs on the upland sandpipers, meadowlarks and bobolinks at the Berlin Airport for the project, which monitors the effect on grassland bird reproduction of delaying mowing large grassy areas at the airports until August 1st each year. (By the way, it works. Populations appear to be thriving at the airports.) Apart from the odd survey for VINS or the Non-game and Natural Heritage Program and one venture to Cape May with the VINS Teen Naturalists to compete in the World Series of Birding, my next serious effort has been our current atlas project which Chip Darmstadt and I co-coordinate for Washington County.

What comes next in the birding line remains to be seen, but I am happy to close with the note that I am currently spending a great deal of time with someone new in my life, Stephanie Krauss, a lady who is also a birder. We plan to take some more of those birding vacations.